

Christ's Last Days on Earth

THE LANCE OF LONGINUS. By Prince Hubertus zu Loewenstein. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1946. 166 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

PRINCE zu Loewenstein is a learned historian, but he is also a devout Catholic. Engaged, since he came to this country about ten years ago, in politico-historical studies, he now has felt the temptation to contribute to the growing bulk of religious fiction. Both his scholarship and the sincerity of his faith seem to single him out for retelling in his own language the eternal story of Christ's last days on earth.

He sees it through the eyes of Longinus, a loyal Roman centurion, who is fully aware of the world-wide significance of what happens in and around the Temple of Jerusalem. The memory of his father, who gave his life in Rome's fight against Jewish zealotism, has made him deeply sensi-



tive to the conflict whose climax he is called upon to witness. Proud though he is of his Roman citizenship and the Roman way of life, he yet cannot close his eyes to the spiritual reasons for the Palestinian disorders. He is an educated man, has read his Virgil, and has come (as only ages to be would do) to interpret the Fourth Eclogue as a Messianic message. When Pilate tries to shift the weight of his responsibility, and wants Longinus to pronounce the final sentence against Jesus of Nazareth, Longinus places his conscience, or rather his conscientious doubts, above his loyalty to the emperor.

Longinus is imprisoned for his disobedience, though more to fortify his own waning trust in traditional values than to please the authorities, he has of his own will tried to prevent the prophesied resurrection of the crucified. "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (St. John 19, 34).

In Prince zu Loewenstein's presentation, the spear is Longinus's

"most cherished possession.... Something of priceless value was attached to it, and it was no ordinary staff. Few officers could boast such a one. In a split second, by pressing two buttons, it could be elongated to three times its length, like a toasting fork. This device had been invented by a

Greek sword-cutler about fifteen years ago, but so far it had not been introduced as part of the general army issue." Some readers, the present one included, may feel that such details do not add to the poignancy of the simple text of the Gospel. The author obviously wants to emulate the efforts of medieval legend tellers. It is his own erudition that stands in his way.

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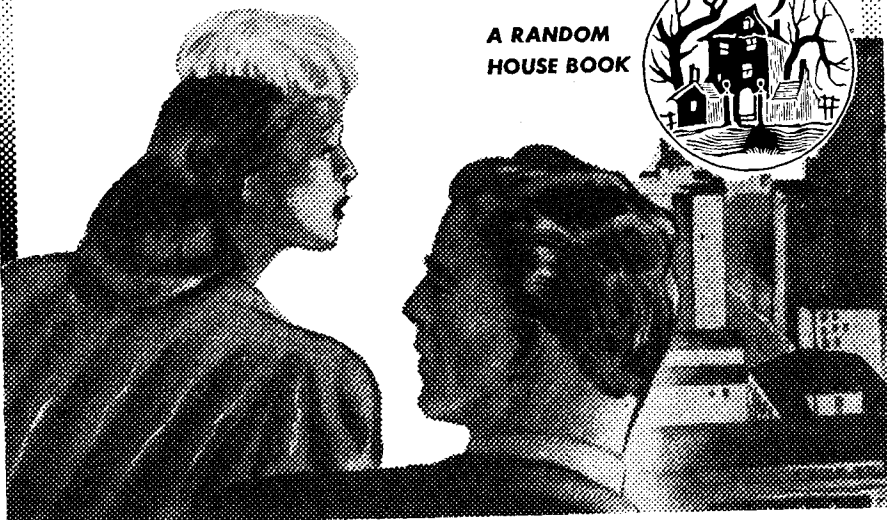
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THE FOXES OF HARROW. By Frank Yerby. New York: Dial Press. 1946. 534 pp. \$3.

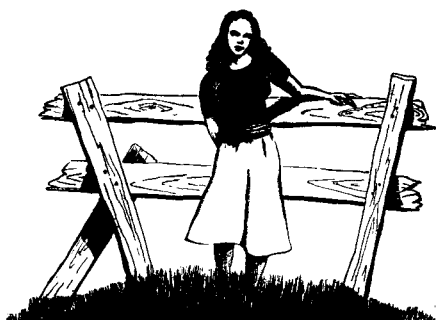
Reviewed by NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

FOR the devotee of the plushy, over-heated romance, this book should provide nothing less than an orgy. It has everything. There are by now so many time-tested characters and situations which have successively furnished the melo-romantic novel that it would seem necessary for the writer who plans one to choose this or that pattern of raging passion and leave the others, however regretfully.

But, you will find, Mr. Yerby has had no such problem. He got them all in, and with notable ease. Stephen Fox, the hero of his book—and the word was never so apt—can only be described as a reincarnation, in one body, of Lucifer, D'Artagnan, Frank Merriwell, and Superman. There is nothing he cannot do, no man he cannot best, no woman he cannot have; and from the moment he lands in New Orleans (time, 1825) with the usual shoestring, all of these things are demonstrated, to the steady accompaniment of the clash of arms, thunder, and lightning. Naturally he builds the greatest fortune in Louisiana, is loved by the two most beautiful women in the South, sisters, and marries both of them, successively.

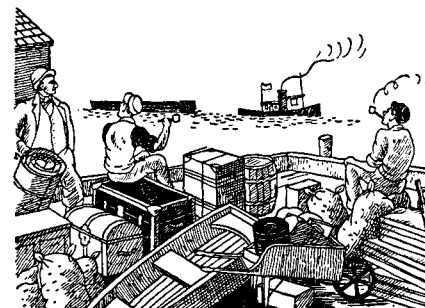
There is, too, the other side of New Orleans, represented by a beautiful Creole, making a triangle of women about the restless Fox. There are sons and daughters who grow and repeat with variations the thematic violence of their begetter. Some mention of the problem of slavery, mounting to the Civil War, is made too, in ringing, telescopic March-of-Time phrases.

As a matter of fact the book rings throughout with colorful passions and the words to match. It is not a historical novel—for that must have some reality in it—but it is a good example of the technicolored fantasies that have been passing as such of late.



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